

Brownfield Opportunity Area Program

The Department of State's Brownfield Opportunity Areas Program (BOA) provides local governments with technical and financial assistance to complete area-wide planning approaches to brownfield redevelopment. Through a community supported planning process, this program enables community leaders to establish a clear vision to revitalize and improve areas so they become economically and environmentally sustainable.

The BOA process has three steps. The first one, the Pre-Nomination Study was submitted by the City of Mount Vernon and accepted in 2009. In 2011, the City was awarded the grant to prepare Step 2: Nomination. The third step provides funding to help with implementation.

The Step 2 Nomination Report provides an in-depth and thorough description and analysis, including an economic and market trends analysis, of existing conditions, opportunities, and reuse potential for properties located in the proposed BOA. An emphasis is placed on the identification and reuse potential of strategic brownfield sites that may be catalysts for revitalization. The Nomination Report concludes with a description of key findings and recommendations to advance redevelopment of strategic sites and to revitalize the area.

A "brownfield" or "brownfield site" is defined in New York State Environmental Conservation Law Article 27, Title 14, as any real property, the redevelopment or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a contaminant.

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Section 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Project Purpose and Context

Canal Village area is the largest industrial area within the City of Mount Vernon and the tax base it generates from properties and businesses makes it a very important place that supports municipal operations. This is a very active area, and community leaders have hope that there is potential for the neighborhood to perform better. It has a wide range of business types in a range of business sectors, however, the overall appearance doesn't make it look as attractive as it could be. The community's optimism is obvious from the two word clouds showing the public response during the public process. These were generated by asking participants in the workshops for this project to write down in one word what comes to mind in describing Canal Village area today, and the same again but in the future.

One Word Exercise

During the Workshop, participants were asked to complete a "One Word" exercise to summarize their impressions of Canal Village area as it currently exists, and how they envision that it might be in the future. These responses are collected and tabulated to discover common themes. This is visualized through the use of a "word cloud" that prioritizes more commonly used words. Key goals, concerns, challenges and opportunities and identified by highlighting certain aspects of the project area through this process.

The more often the same word was repeated, the larger it appears.

ONE WORD for how the community sees Canal Village area today...



ONE WORD for how the community wants to see Canal Village area in the future...



Canal Village area is in the southeast corner of the City. This area lays along the eastern edge of the city limits that coincide with Hutchinson River and it includes the industrial area in the southeast corner of the City. Canal Village area consists of approximately 251 acres, of which 202 acres are divided into parcels for private and public development. Its southern boundary is with the Bronx, New York City.

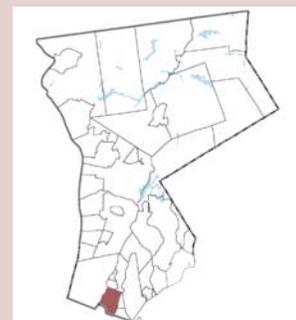
Since this planning effort has been made possible by two separate grants being combined: New York State's BOA and LWRP programs, there are two separate project boundaries. The two boundaries overlap south of Sanford Boulevard. This document serves as the BOA Nomination Report, however there are elements included from the LWRP project that influence the goals and actions of the BOA project area.

The City of Mount Vernon is the Lead Sponsor of this effort, titled the Canal Village Revitalization Project with administration by the Department of Planning and Community Development, in coordination with the Office of the Mayor.

The economics of the neighborhood today, described in more detail in Section 3, indicate that two sectors for growth in the neighborhood include increasing activities for food production and service, and making the retail area along Sanford Boulevard and other nodes more pedestrian oriented to increase patronage.



Westchester County



City of Mount Vernon



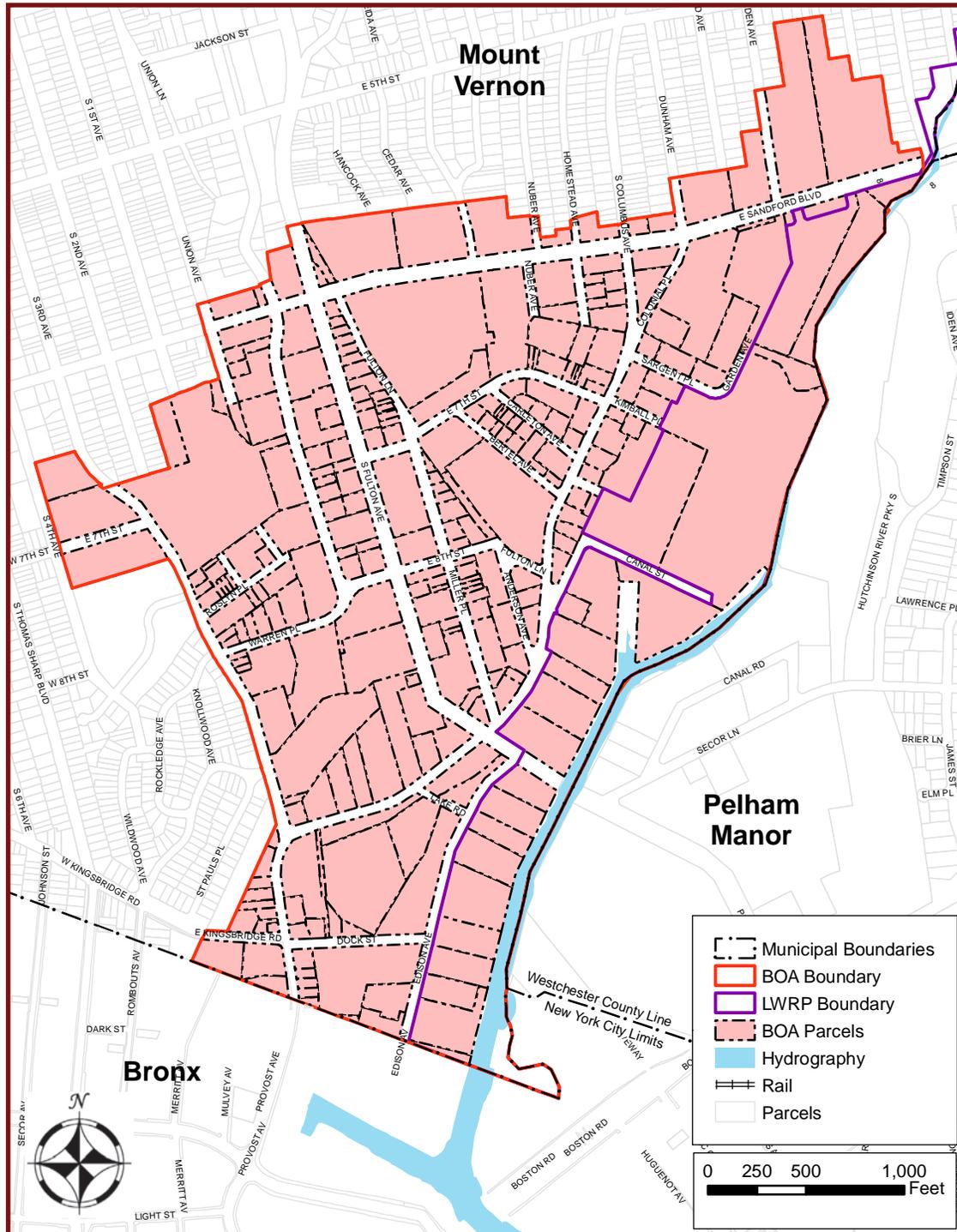
Canal Village neighborhood

PROJECT BOUNDARIES

The BOA Boundary

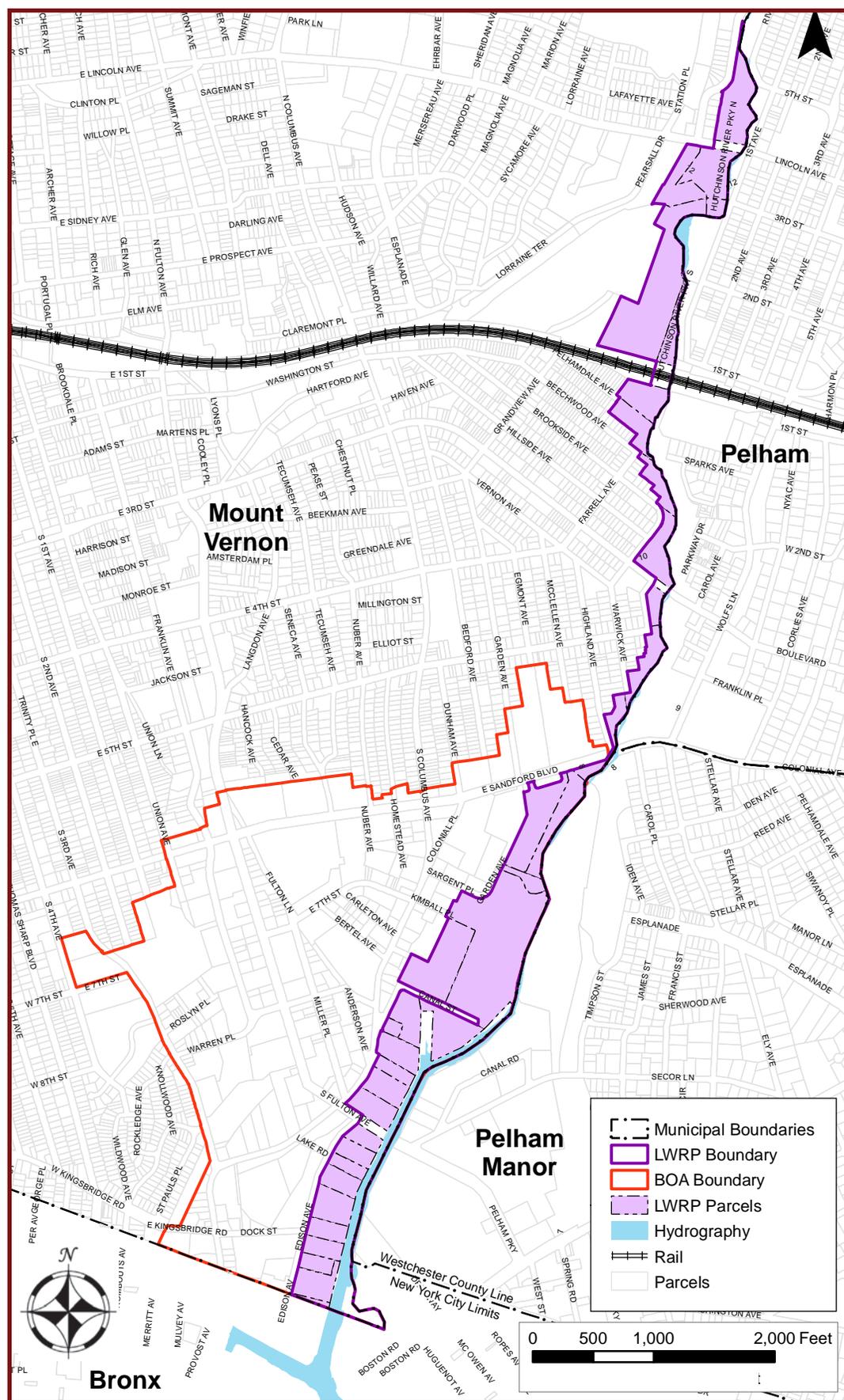
The BOA project area is about 251 acres bound on the north by the properties that face both sides of East Sanford Boulevard from Hutchinson River on the east to Union Avenue on the west. The southern boundary is the southern edge of the city limits adjacent to the Bronx, from the Hutchinson River Canal on the east to just past South 3rd Avenue on the west at the end of the industrial district. The eastern boundary is along the eastern city limit line

adjacent to Huntington River from the southeast corner of the city north to East Sanford Boulevard. The western boundary is along South 3rd Avenue including all industrial and commercial properties (but no single family residential lots) from the city limits in the south up to just past Benjamin Middle School. From there the western boundary follows along the edges of the industrial properties up to Sanford Boulevard and Union Avenue.

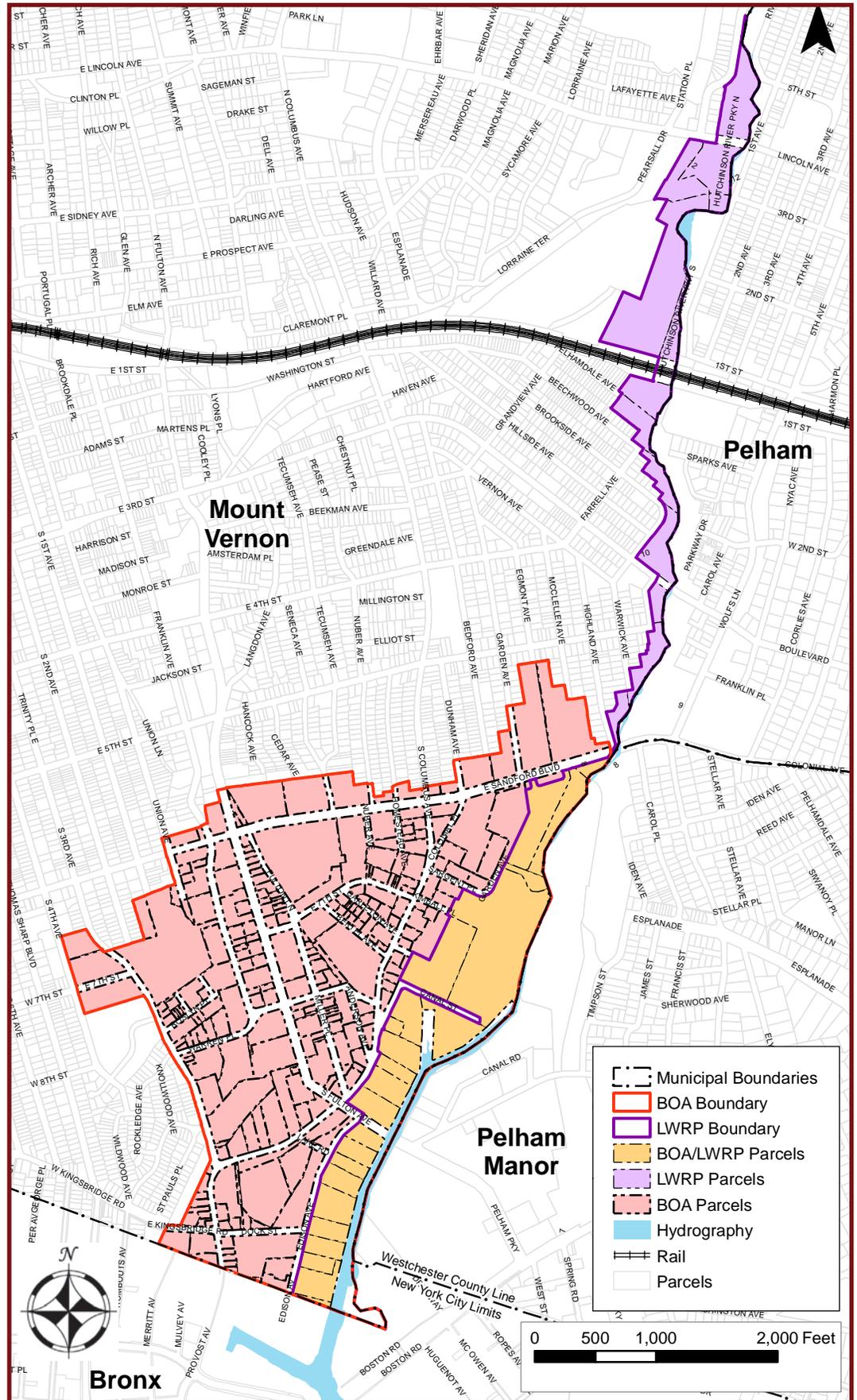


The LWRP Boundary

The LWRP Project area includes all properties directly adjacent to Hutchinson River from the southern city limits to an area just past Lincoln Avenue. This is about 60 acres that stretch along two miles of riverfront. Wilson Woods Park is included within the northern portion of the project area. The Hutchinson River runs along the City's eastern boundaries. Since the neighboring municipalities of Pelham and Pelham Manor also have a stake in the conditions of the river, the villages have been included in this effort so that the project participants can examine and impact areas outside the boundaries that may affect the water body through drainage, view shed, and other similar factors.



Combined BOA & LWRP Boundary

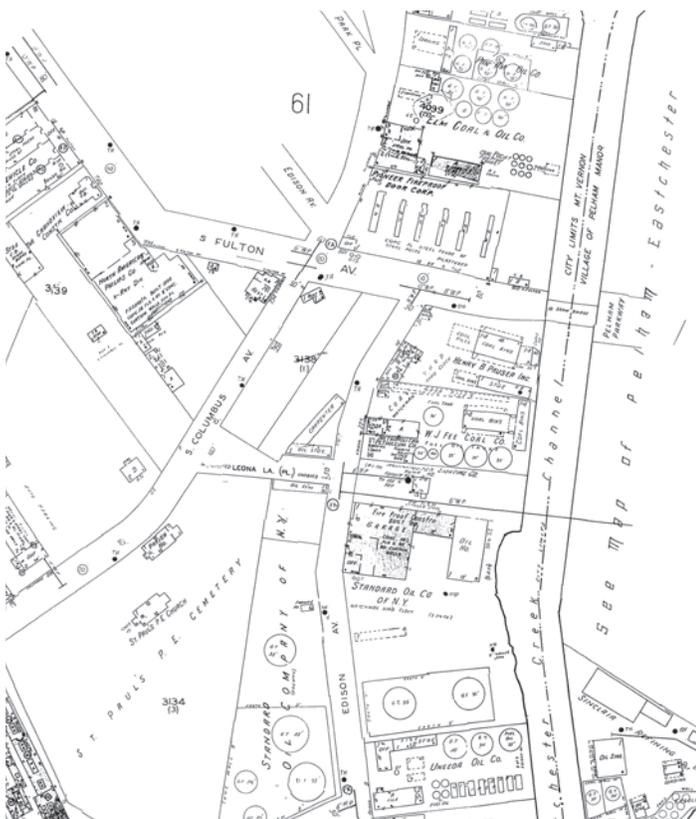


BROWNFIELD SITES

Except for the public parks and a few commercial retail parcels, Canal Village area consists mostly of Brownfield sites. Privately owned properties vary in size from a quarter acre up to seven acres. Hutchinson Park was once the leaching field for the sewage treatment plant and Memorial Field was recently used to dump a substantial amount of construction debris.

The range of businesses vary considerably. There are heavy industrial uses such as two asphalt plants, as well as mini-storage, car repair, t-shirt makers, light industrial product assembly companies, sign makers, Christmas display decorators and installers, food industry with makers and suppliers, national retailers, fast food restaurants, a large grocery store, a national pharmacy, gas stations, office buildings, school bus storage, and a scrap yard. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from the 1920 through the 1960s show that the properties along the canal were largely used for gasoline storage in large circular tanks. Today only Spague Energy has such a facility. Section 3 of this document contains a detailed list of strategic brownfield sites and the criteria used to determine those.

Within the LWRP north of Sandford Boulevard, there is only one industrial property which is an empty building formerly occupied by Landuaer Metropolitan, a manufacturer of Medical equipment, on the edge of the boundary at Wilson Woods Park.



1955 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. The canal is to the right side.

BROWNFIELD JUSTIFICATION

Canal Village area does not contain parcels where residential properties are permitted. The intention from the start, when setting the borders for the BOA, was to only include the contiguous industrial and commercial zoned properties in the southeast corner of the City. There are no intended residential properties, however there are a few limited, older buildings that pre-date the City's zoning ordinances that are used for apartments or group homes.

Other than these parcels, the properties within Canal Village area have been used for industrial and commercial use for more than 100 years. In a 1910 atlas of Westchester County, the Eastchester Canal was already created and a few of the estates that had been there originally were being replaced by industrial buildings. By the 1920s, another County Atlas shows that the canal was lined with gasoline storage tanks. Therefore, there is a long history of industrial uses (and pollution) in this area.

In and along the edges of Canal Village there are publicly owned recreational parks. These were included within the project area for the possibility that they could be helpful with future opportunities.

The eastern limit of the project area is the City Limit that runs along the Hutchinson River which flows out to sea through the Eastchester Canal. Because of the pollution in the canal, the City also received an LWRP grant for the same area, to combine resources. The LWRP boundary south of Sandford Boulevard includes the properties within Canal Village area that touch the canal or river. North of Sandford Boulevard the boundaries include only the publicly owned lands that are part of the Hutchinson River Parkway. Most of the properties along the parkway north of Sandford are residential but there is usually a street between the house lots and the parkway property. As in the BOA site selection, the intention for the LWRP was also to not include any residential properties.

The Department of State (DoS) recommends that a BOA be between 50 and 500 acres in size. The Canal Village is approximately 251 acres. The City has a lot of political will to help with improvements. With the deterioration of public streets and spaces, the aging appearance of the buildings, and the desire to increase the City's commercial tax base, makes this the most likely place to implement the BOA and LWRP strategies.

COMMUNITY VISION, GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Community Vision

The following vision statements comes from a synthesis of the wishes and desires expressed by the community participants of the first two workshops and other public meetings:

[These statements satisfy the SEQRA Generic Environmental Impact Statement content requirements of 6 NYCRR Section 617.9 (b)(5)(i).]

Canal Village Brownfield Opportunity Areas (BOA) Mission & Vision Statement

With property owners, not-for-profit organizations, and government, we will transform the Canal Village in the near term through our collective actions into an attractive, desirable, and economically vital neighborhood that will provide multiple activities: Work, Shopping, Dining, Recreating, and Entertaining without polluting the Hutchinson River. We will see an increase in the tax base for the City to further neighborhood improvements, and improvements to the quality of life for citizens by having better access to jobs, exercise, entertainment, dining and purchases.

Hutchinson River Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) Mission & Vision Statement

With property owners, not-for-profit organizations, and multiple levels of government, we will enhance the Hutchinson River Waterfront and shared community areas in the near term through our collective actions into a beautiful and environmentally clean natural amenity for the City and its neighbors. We will see improved access to and through the publicly owned lands by way of paved sidewalks and trails, points of interest enhanced with public art and historical markers, and the installation of facilities and management to keep the parkway clean to the environment, maintained (attractive), and safe from crime.

Goals

Four main goals for this effort are identified below. These are economic in nature. To accomplish these, there are four additional supporting goals that identify physical improvements in Canal Village and Hutchinson River Parkway. Without reaching these physical improvement goals, it will be difficult to accomplish the main goals.

Main Goals

- Goal 1: To Increase tax base for the city without driving away existing business (Support local businesses to improve business)
- Goal 2: To attract new businesses and reinvestment that can add new jobs with higher pay.
- Goal 3: To have the Canal Village be a destination for multiple activities: Work, Shopping, Dining, Recreating, and Entertaining.
- Goal 4: To improve the environmental health of the Hutchinson River and the parkway as best as possible.

Supporting Goals

- Goal 5: To Improve the physical appearance of the neighborhood.
- Goal 6: To make the neighborhood safe from crime.
- Goal 7: To balance traffic congestion with the needs of the local businesses.
- Goal 8: To expand recreational and entertainment opportunities by focusing improvements to Hutchinson Field, Memorial Field, and the Hutchinson River Parkway and where possible offer public access to the Hutchinson River

Goals with their Objectives

Main Goals

Goal 1: To Increase tax base for the city without driving away existing business (Support local businesses to improve business)

Objective 1A:

Continue a dialog with the local business owners to stay aware of issues in the neighborhood and to offer assistance where possible. This is dependent on the business owners organizing themselves into a group that holds regular meetings. This could also be accomplished by a focus group from the Chamber of Commerce. The City will then have to designate a coordinator with whom the business owners can meet on a regular basis.

Objective 1B:

Assist with establishing a Parking Plan for Canal Village area. Many of the buildings in the neighborhood were built before parking regulations, and some historic properties may not be able to meet current regulations. The parking plan can accommodate on-street parking rules and remote parking.

Objective 1C:

Establish Loading Zones within public rights-of-way. Currently trucks often block travel lanes to load or unload. For those properties that don't have their own loading area, communal designated loading areas can be demarcated in line with parallel parking spaces. This will help maintain a proper traffic flow.

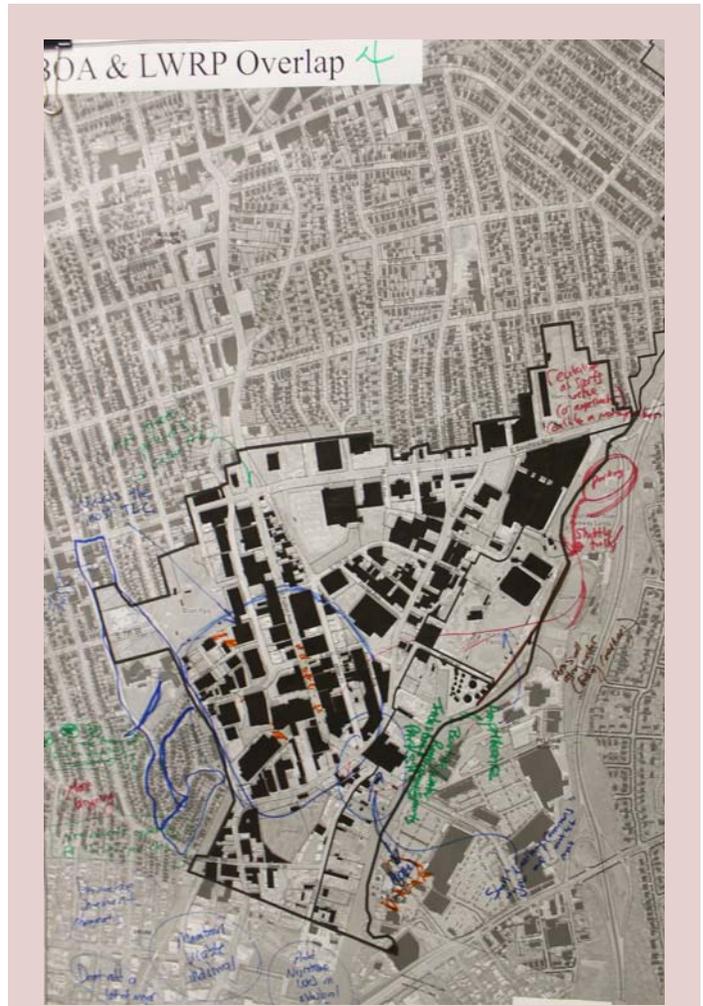
Goal 2: To attract new businesses and reinvestment that can add new jobs with higher pay.

Objective 2A:

Promote and market the neighborhood regionally. This can be done by the Chamber of Commerce, Mount Vernon's Industrial Development Agency (IDA), or a new organization that could be formed by local business owners that could become a Business Improvement District. The mission is the same as the goal.

Objective 2B:

Improve and enhance neighborhood amenities that would be attractive to employers and employees. To get the best talent in the workplace, many leading businesses offer amenities to attract employees out of college or high school. They blur the traditional lines of what 'work' and 'play' has traditionally meant. The younger workforce looks for access to transit, recreational options nearby during work hours and after hours, access to open space when the weather is nice, and lunch & dining options.



One of six site maps from Workshop #1. Participants marked up these maps to identify their concerns and potential opportunities for the Canal Village neighborhood.



Property and business owners' meet after each of the Workshops to further discuss opportunities, interests, and lessons learned in the Canal Village.

Goal 3: To have Canal Village area be a destination for multiple activities: Work, Shopping, Dinning, Recreating, and Entertaining.

Objective 3A:

Maintain or update zoning regulations that promote this mix of uses within Canal Village area. The redevelopment Study that is part of this report analyzes the current zoning regulations. Having diversity in the workplace protects the economic strength of the neighborhood when certain sectors experience a downturn.

Objective 3B:

Preserve Industrial Uses. Do not allow residential intrusion into the pure industrial areas. Industrial land is rare and the city should not foreclose on the ability to have industrial land now and in the future. Participants agreed that it is important to keep Industrial businesses in the neighborhood since they contribute to the local economy and character.

Goal 4: To improve the environmental health of the Hutchinson River and the parkway as best as possible.

Objective 4A:

Conduct a chemical analysis of the water to set at least three base lines from which to measure future progress. One where the River enters Mount Vernon's City limits to the north, one near Sandford Boulevard upstream of the Eastchester Canal, and another at the southern city limits at the Eastchester Canal. Establish a regular timetable and program for future retesting to determine progress.

Objective 4B:

Clamp down hard on the dumping. This is a battle that needs to be fought on several fronts. There is vacuumed pumped water being released into the river. There is construction debris, old tires, and other unknown agents. A program can be initiated to:

- Post signage,
- Set up surveillance cameras at known problem sites,
- Increase policing along the edge streets and along the trails, and
- Start a public awareness program about the problem of dumping that pollutes the river, so that the citizenry can help monitor the parkway. This should be accompanied by a hotline phone number or website.

Objective 4C:

Perform best landscaping practices. This requires assistance with Westchester County. Any new installations of landscaping should be of native species. This includes not only trees and scrubs but ground cover as well. Native grasses along the shore of Pelham Lake and the riverbank will help buffer toxins from entering the water. There are invasive species already at work destroying the integrity of the parkway, including the Japanese Knotweed/Porcelain Berry. More attention to maintenance is needed throughout the parkway keeping trails accessible and avoiding hidden areas to prevent crime locations.

Objective 4D:

Dredge Pelham Lake. This is needed to remove invasive waterborne species, such as Water Chestnut, and to control sediment beds.

Objective 4E:

Curtail Storm water runoff into the river. The roadway from the Hutchinson Parkway, the parking areas in Wilson Woods park, and the large paved areas inside the industrial area of Canal Village are all draining directly into the river. Storm water controls and landscaping in all the roadways that slope down to the river should be evaluated for future feasible installations.

Objective 4F:

Remove Graffiti. Unfortunately, there is considerable graffiti along the beautiful stone walls that remain from the original parkway construction. This needs to be pressure washed away. The used-up spray cans probably also find their way to the river.

Objective 4G:

Use caution when approving temporary structures within the parks and the parkway, so that they don't inadvertently add pollutants to the water. Such structures might be Portapotties, food trucks, tents, etc.



The edges of the Eastchester Canal need repair. The black specks in the water is pollution from a local business.

Supporting Goals

Goal 5: To Improve the physical appearance of the neighborhood.

Objective 5A:

Repair Potholes in Roads: Potholes can increase cost of maintenance for vehicles, which can lead to a decrease in efficiency for local industries.

Objective 5B:

Repair Sidewalks: Repairing these conditions can benefit business and the neighborhood by improving the accessibility to establishments, as well as minimizing perceived unsafe conditions.

Objective 5C:

Plant Street Trees: Bringing more plant life into the streets of Canal Village was important to most participants. While street trees provide shade, they also provide a buffer between pedestrians on the sidewalk and vehicular traffic.

Objective 5D:

Highlight historical places and events: Participants expressed an interest in featuring the historical nature of the neighborhood though both sign and plaque installations, as well as featuring buildings of local historical quality and significance to the neighborhood. These signs or plaques can be located throughout Canal Village area and along the Hutchinson River Parkway Trails.

Objective 5E:

Highlight the Industrial Character: It was important to both residents, as well as property and business owners that the industrial character of Canal Village should be maintained. This can be done by working with property owners to make improvement to building facades. A set of architectural guidelines can be established based on the character of the older buildings in the neighborhood that can be used for new buildings as well as the restoration of existing buildings.

Goal 6: To make the neighborhood safe from crime

Objective 6A:

Install Light Fixtures: Installing light fixtures along the street as well as the Hutchinson River Parkway Trail will improve visibility and safety in these areas.

Objective 6B:

Install Emergency Call Boxes: Call boxes in the Hutchinson River Parkway Trail and a few key locations in Canal Village area would allow emergency responders to react quickly to emergency situations.



Graffiti and trash is a common problem.

Goal 7: To balance traffic congestion with the needs of the local businesses.

Objective 7A:

Reconstruct streetscapes to include wider sidewalks and bike lanes in the streets: One of the ways to reduce car trips within or going through the neighborhood is to make it possible for pedestrians and bicyclists not have to get in their cars if they don't want to. If it is not easy to walk or bike they won't. Participants expressed the desire for a bike lane network in Mount Vernon that could also connect in Canal Village. Safety along the industrial streets of Canal Village area was an important factor for the community to make use of the bike lanes.

Objective 7B:

Improve Public Transit: There is no better way to assist with relieving traffic than by making transit easy to access, plus it reduces parking demands. Property and business owners expressed the benefit of an expanded, effective transit system. While there are several bus lines in Canal Village area, it was determined that more incentives could be provided. These might be in the form of improvements to the bus stops, frequency of busses, and financial incentives at the workplace.

Goal 8: To expand recreational and entertainment opportunities by focusing improvements to Hutchinson Field, Memorial Field, and the Hutchinson River Parkway and where possible offer public access to the Hutchinson River.

Objective 8A:

Revitalize Memorial Field: Nearly all participants were enthusiastic about the reconstruction of Memorial Field. It currently sits unused and fenced off and could be integrated as part of a recreational network within Mount Vernon.

Objective 8B:

Revitalize Hutchinson Field: This park is along the Hutchinson River but offers no direct access to it. This park could offer that with a Canoe / Kayak launch, which was a popular topic of discussion. Other possibilities include installing a splash park and wading pool with a sunbathing “beach.”

Objective 8C:

Revive the Hutchinson River Parkway Trail with improved Bike and Running Trails: Nearly all participants expressed a need for a running and biking trail, and an interest in making more use of the Hutchinson River. Most discussions centered around this idea and improvements to the trail developed into a main theme. Mount Vernon has few natural amenities and the Hutchinson River is perhaps their most beautiful.

Objective 8D:

Install Benches Along the River: The community determined that benches should be installed at scenic locations to provide places to rest and relax along the Hutchinson River Parkway Trail. These could also be installed with scenic lookouts if appropriate.

Objective 8E:

Expand the City’s park space: The community wanted to see if there were any additional opportunities within the Canal Village neighborhood for more landscaped green space installations.

Objective 8F:

Establish Venues for Entertainment: Nearly all participants indicated that they leave Mount Vernon for entertainment on a daily, or weekly basis. They expressed a desire to see these opportunities within Mount Vernon through such uses as restaurants, or an outdoor amphitheater.

Objective 8G:

Investigate options for how to best use the Closed Pharmaceutical Building in Wilson’s Woods Park: Currently there is a pharmaceutical office building next to Wilson’s Woods Park that has been closed for some time. It was the former Landuaer Metropolitan building. The community identified this location as an opportunity to create a local business such as a restaurant, brewery, civic center or indoor recreational facility. The City could acquire this property and investigate to determine if a retrofit, or a demolition would be the most financially and programmatically feasible course of action.



Common conditions: narrow streets, narrow sidewalks and lack of Parking and Loading space.



Columbus Avenue (Left) and Canal Street (Right)



Common conditions: narrow streets, narrow sidewalks and lack of Parking and Loading space.